

Dear Senator Lesser, Representative Scanlon and distinguished members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Katherine Villeda and I am from Stamford. I am a leader and facilitator for CT Students for a Dream, as well as an advocate at a women's health center. I am testifying in support of proposed S.B. 330 An Act Establishing a Human Right to Equal Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Health and proposed H.B. 6093 An Act Concerning Consideration of Immigration Status by Health Carriers. Everyone in Connecticut deserves access to health care as a basic human right and S.B. 330 will restore language in statute stating that priority as a state. H.B. 6093 would prohibit health insurance and health carriers from denying health insurance policies to anyone in this state based on immigration status.

Health care as a human right is a unifying principle for health policy: ensuring that health care and coverage are accessible and affordable to all and that policies be enacted to reflect and support this principle. S.B. 330 would ensure that moving forward the people are the core interest of future legislation and not the interest of companies. Everyone in Connecticut deserves access to quality, affordable health care as a basic human right — regardless of income, insurance, or immigration status.

The consequences of being undocumented contribute to a culture of fear in the immigrant community and keep too many from seeking the lifesaving care they need. Growing up, I remember one of my undocumented family members who was a nurse before coming to the United States, would provide basic healthcare services in her home to her undocumented peers who were too fearful to go to the clinic, either because of the fear of being deported, language barriers or getting trapped in massive medical debt. She would take their blood pressure, do blood sugar tests, and help them administer their insulin shots. Furthermore, growing up in a mixed-status family, I have personally seen how lack of access to healthcare services has impacted my immigrant parents. My parents have been here for over two decades and have only gone to the doctor a handful of times. These barriers were particularly evident after the sudden death of my brother. My parents did not have access to mental health services that could have greatly helped them. Bottom line: No one's physical, emotional and mental health should be compromised because of their immigration status.

Access to health insurance means that families are able to go to the doctor when they are sick, seek preventive care before a condition grows complicated, get life-saving treatment when they need it, and live without exposure to catastrophic medical debt. This, unfortunately, is not a reality for most undocumented residents, who are too often faced with too many barriers when trying to access healthcare services. With more than 130,000 estimated undocumented immigrants residing in our state, this is a public health concern. H.B. 6093 seeks to equalize access to health insurance to all regardless of immigration status and S.B. 330 would ensure that when talking about future healthcare policy, the undocumented community is not left out of the conversation, but invited to come in and share their experiences and their needs.

Furthermore, S.B. 330 would not only be a precedent to push Connecticut to improve its healthcare system, but also everything else. Achieving the highest attainable standard of health includes improving our educational system, criminal justice system, infrastructure, statewide

immigration policies, and economic opportunities. We as a state have a long way to go, especially when we look at the statistics that we, one of the wealthiest states in the country, are one of the worst states for income and educational disparities and inequality.

I strongly support proposed bills S.B. 330 and H.B. 6093 and I hope the committee and Connecticut lawmakers will vote favorably to ensure that all people will have access to health care, a fundamental human right that should be guaranteed to all people in our state.

Thank you for your time,
Katherine Villeda